

**Remarks for the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations
Subcommittee Member Day**

Congressman Peter J. Visclosky

March 27, 2019

I would like to thank Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and all the members of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee for holding today's hearing and providing this opportunity for myself and all members to speak about priorities for your Subcommittee in Fiscal Year 2020.

I would first like to offer my gratitude towards this Subcommittee for including language in the Fiscal Year 2019 Consolidated Appropriations Act that established the Indiana Dunes National Park. While this law only changed one word, the establishment of the newly minted Indiana Dunes National Park has greatly increased the visibility and the recognition of the southern shore of Lake Michigan in Northwest Indiana and it is my hope that it will attract more visitors from around the world to enjoy this wonderful natural resource.

To begin, I wish to impress upon this Subcommittee the continued need for addressing the National Park Service's deferred maintenance backlog. For Fiscal Year 2018, the Indiana Dunes had a maintenance backlog of nearly \$28 million. This has hindered the Park's ability to maintain trails and roadways, demolish structures, and restore parcels of land to their natural state for public enjoyment. Nationwide, the National Park Service's deferred maintenance backlog totals nearly \$11.9 billion.

To be clear, I believe that it is the responsibility of Congress to address this backlog and not the general public. While I am not outright opposed to modest increases in certain entrance and parking fees, I opposed past proposals by this Administration to dramatically increase fees at our

nation's most popular parks, rendering them unaffordable to large portions of the American populace.

Therefore, Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee, I respectfully request that you reject the Administration's cuts to the National Park Service's Facility Operations and Maintenance account and provide robust funding to the National Park Service, so they may address the deferred maintenance backlog.

My other priority for this Subcommittee is to enhance funding for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). I strongly believe that one of the principal roles of the federal government is to protect the health and safety of the citizens of the United States. By investigating environmental hazards that may be present in the air we breathe or the water we drink, the ATSDR helps ensure the health and safety of vulnerable populations, including children. The ATSDR estimates that it has saved thousand of children from harmful exposure to lead, saving up to \$90 million in lifetime earnings lost due to low IQ.

Funding for the ATSDR has remained relatively flat since Fiscal Year 2010, when it received \$77 million. However, if adjusted for inflation, funding for the ATSDR has actually decreased by nearly \$15 million over the last decade. The President's budget request exacerbates this problem by only requesting \$62 million for the ATSDR, approximately \$12.7 million below the Fiscal Year 2019 funding level. The ATSDR currently lacks the resources necessary to provide appropriate funding to state health departments that will help state and local officials implement plans to assist residents in reducing and treating exposure to toxic substances. This funding will help communities like East Chicago in Indiana's First Congressional District, whose citizens have been exposed to hazardous levels of lead at the USS Lead Superfund Site.

As such, Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee, I would also respectfully request that you reject the Administration's cuts to the ATSDR and fund the Agency at \$150 million in Fiscal Year 2020.

Finally, I would like to use this opportunity to express my frustration with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) failure to set a nationwide maximum contaminant level for PFOS and PFOA. These chemicals have been widely used by the Department of Defense since the 1970s to put out fires and train military firefighters. They have been linked to an increased risk of cancers and other serious health effects, and have contaminated groundwater near hundreds of military bases, commercial airports, and chemical plants. As Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I will continue to push the DoD to get after this issue with the urgency and seriousness it deserves; however, I believe that those efforts will be hindered by the lack of a EPA standard for cleanup and no established regimen for determining liability at sites that are co-located with civilian airports. I would welcome the opportunity to work with the Chairwoman and the Ranking Member on this issue that cuts across the jurisdiction of the two subcommittees.

I again thank this Subcommittee for holding this hearing and allowing me and other members to speak about priorities for Fiscal Year 2020. This Subcommittee's work is critical in protecting our environment and the health and safety of all Americans and I look forward to working with you in the coming year.